

CHAPTER IX

RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS AND LOCAL CUSTOMS

RAMADAN

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[805] THIS fast, which is the name of a month in the Islamic calendar, has often been described as the Moslem Lent. During Ramadan there is a complete ban on eating, drinking and smoking during the hours of daylight. The Moslem day begins at sunset, and each evening during Ramadan the setting of the sun is announced by the firing of guns in various towns, the signal that eating and drinking may commence. Two meals are eaten during the night, the first as soon as possible after sunset and the second shortly before dawn. It is often the custom to break the fast with a drink of butter-milk, before proceeding to the heavy eating. After the first meal is over people in Bahrain go visiting and sit in the coffee-shops and cinemas. At the beginning of Ramadan, all through the night the town is busy with the coming and going of the people, radios and gramophones play at full blast in the coffee-shops and night is turned into day. Later in the month there is some slackening of activity, people return earlier to their homes and endeavour to get some sleep, but they are soon awakened by the drummers who go around the town before dawn waking the sleepers so that they may eat before it becomes light. Of necessity the non-Moslem follows the Islamic time-table during this month, for he is usually kept awake by the activity in the streets, and if he does succeed in getting to sleep he is soon awakened by the persistent drummers on their rounds.

According to Moslem Law eating, drinking and smoking must cease directly it is possible to discern the difference between a black and a white thread, but it is now the custom in Bahrain towns to fire guns to announce the break of day. During the day in Ramadan life moves at a slower pace than during the other months of the year, and this is especially true when Ramadan falls in the summer, for the combination of no food and drink and the heat and dampness of Bahrain reduces peoples' energy. It is noticeable that there are more court cases about domestic troubles during Ramadan while the serious crimes decrease. In the evenings in this month the townsfolk go out to the gardens and sit in the shade of the trees waiting for darkness to fall. Adari is particularly popular, many fasters try to reduce their thirst by swimming lazily in the cool waters of the pool.

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As with all Moslem occasions, the end of Ramadan is decided by the appearance of the new moon, about which there is usually a dispute. While the Sunnis recognise the Royal Observatory at Cairo as an authority on the appearance of the moon, the Shia insist that it should be seen in Bahrain. The result has often been that the Eid has started on two different days for the two sects, and in one memorable year there were three Eid days, one for each of the two sects and a third for the Ismailis, who have their own way of reckoning dates.

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For those interested in sending food parcels to friends or relatives in England the following facts may be of interest. Not more than one parcel may be sent at any one time to one consignee in England. The total weight of the food parcel may not exceed 18 pounds, and no more than four pounds of any one commodity can be sent. There are no restrictions at present in force regarding the export of food-stuffs from Bahrain.

There are three post offices in Bahrain; one on Prior Road, Manama, a second on Sea Road, Muharraq and a third at Awali.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

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The following are public holidays in Bahrain :

Every Friday, this is the Moslem sabbath.

New Years Day.

Eid Ramadan, a three days holiday at the end of the month of fasting, in 1953 this feast will fall on the 13th, 14th and 15th June.

Eid al-Hajj, a three days holiday on the 10th 11th and 12th of the Arabic month of Dhul Hajj at the conclusion of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. In 1953 this feast will fall on the 10th, 11th and 12th August.

Ashura, a two days holiday, but not a feast; these days, the 9th and 10th Muharram are when the Shia mourn the death of Hussein at Kerbela. In 1953 this holiday will take place on the 18th and 19th September.

The Prophet's Birthday, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. In 1953 this feast will take place on 19th November.

Christmas Day.

The dates of Moslem feast days and holidays are based on the Islamic lunar calendar, and consequently *move back ten days each year and eleven days in leap years*,

CALENDAR

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The official calendar in Bahrain is the Moslem calendar and as stated above, Moslem holidays are based on it. The Moslem months are as follows :

Muharram	Rajab
Safar	Shaban
Rabia al-Awal	Ramadan
Rabia ath-Thani	Shawal
Jamadi al-Awal	Dhul Qada
Jamadi ath-Thani	Dhul Hajj

The Islamic calendar dates from 622 A.D., the year in which the Hijra took place.

The following are the first days of the next ten Hijra years :

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1372—September 21st, 1952	1377—July 29th, 1957.
1373—September 10th, 1953.	1378—July 18th, 1958.
1374—August 30th, 1954.	1379—July 7th, 1959.
1375—August 20th, 1955.	1380—June 26th, 1960.
1376—August 8th, 1956.	1381—June 15th, 1961.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

In addition to the standard weights and measures, the following are in use in Bahrain :

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Weight.	Length.
39 tolas = 1 ratl (1 pound)	12 busas (inch) = 1 qadm (foot)
4 ratls = 1 rub'a	3 aqdam = 1 waar (yard)
56 ratls = 1 maund.	
14 rub'as = 1 maund.	

SUNRISE AND SUNSET

Date.	Sunrise.	Sunset.*	Date.	Sunrise.	Sunset.
1st Jan.	7.25 a.m.	5.58 p.m.	1st July	5.49 a.m.	7.34 p.m.
1st Feb.	7.44 a.m.	6.20 p.m.	1st Aug.	6.03 a.m.	7.26 p.m.
1st Mar.	7.02 a.m.	6.40 p.m.	1st Sep.	6.18 a.m.	6.57 p.m.
1st April	6.31 a.m.	6.55 p.m.	1st Oct.	6.30 a.m.	6.25 p.m.
1st May	6.02 a.m.	7.09 p.m.	1st Nov.	6.47 a.m.	5.56 p.m.
1st June	5.41 a.m.	7.27 p.m.	1st Dec.	7.08 a.m.	5.45 p.m.

CHURCHES

At the time of writing there are three churches in Bahrain, the Roman Catholic Church on Shaikh Isa Road, Manama, where there is also an English speaking school, and the Dutch Reformed Church of America, at the junction of Shaikh Isa Road and Shaikh Abdulla Road.

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There is also in Bahrain an Anglican Chaplain and an Anglican Church on a plot of ground to the east of the Police Fort donated by the Ruler of Bahrain.

There is a church building in Awali which is used for services by various denominations.

NEWSPAPERS AND BOOKS

There are no English language newspapers published in Bahrain with the exception of a fortnightly duplicated magazine published by and for the English speaking employees of BAPCO. There are, however, four Arabic publications. The *Government Gazette*, the official publication of the Bahrain Government in which official notices, laws and reports are found, *Sawt al-Bahrain*, a monthly with articles of literary, cultural and religious interest, articles on Bahrain, poetry and a gossip column, *al-Khamila*, a weekly mainly concerned with the doings of the entertainment world in Egypt and containing light articles, jokes and poems and *al-Qafila*, the newest publication.

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